

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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O R 172255Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7352
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 1078

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, EC
SUBJECT: MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM

REF: A) QUITO 1029; B) STATE 41780

1. SUMMARY. ACCORDING TO MINDEFENSE, GOE HAS DEFINITELY DECIDED TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM THROUGH THE ELECTION LAW TO BE PROMULGATED WITHIN A FEW DAYS. THE MILITARY CONSIDERS ITS ACTIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE RETURN TO AN ENDURING DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. THE EMBASSY IS FOLLOWING GUIDANCE IN REF B) IN CONVERSATIONS WITH GOE LEADERS ON THIS SUBJECT. END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTER OF DEFENSE ANDRES ARRATA MACIAS CONFIRMED TO CHARGE ON FEB. 19 THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM THROUGH THE REQUIREMENTS THAT WILL BE INCLUDED FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN THE ELECTION LAW WHICH IS TO BE PROMULGATED WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. CHARGE RESPONDED THAT ALTHOUGH HE HAD HEARD RUMORS OF THIS HE WAS SURPRISED, PARTICULARLY SINCE
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THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM HAD SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT BUCARAM WAS NOT REALLY SO STRONG AS HAD BEEN SUPPOSED. ARRATA AGREED THAT BUCARAM MIGHT BE BEATEN IN A FREE ELECTION BUT SAID THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAD DETERMINED IT COULD NOT RUN THIS RISK.

3. ARRATA SAID THE DECISION TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM HAD

BEEN MADE FOR TWO REASONS: A) THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP DID NOT WISH TO SEE THE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ACHIEVED FOR ECUADOR SINCE 1972 DESTROYED, WISHING TO ENSURE THAT THE REGIME OF THE CIVILIAN PRESIDENT WHO TAKES POWER WILL ENDURE; AND B) THAT BUCARAM WAS IN EXTREMELY POOR HEALTH AND MIGHT NOT SURVIVE A PRESIDENTIAL TERM, WHICH ALSO MIGHT WRECK THE MILITARY'S EFFORTS TO RETURN ECUADOR TO A LASTING AND SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

4. THE CHARGE, DRAWING UPON THE GUIDANCE IN REF B., STATED THAT THE USG HAD CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN ITS PLANS TO RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, AND THAT WE HAD BEEN PLEASED AT THE SUCCESSFUL CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM AND THE LARGE PARTICIPATION IN IT. HE SAID THE USG HAD HOPED THAT ECUADOR WOULD HAVE PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS THAT WOULD HAVE THE FULL AND FAIR PARTICIPATION OF ALL ITS CITIZENS. HE ADDED THAT THE USG, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO TAKE NO ACTIONS NOR TO EXPRESS ANY STATEMENTS THAT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS INTERVENTION IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF ECUADOR AND THAT THIS WOULD REMAIN THE USG'S POSITION.

5. IN RESPONSE TO THE CHARGE'S QUESTIONS, ARRATA SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTS SOME REACTION FROM BUCARAM'S
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PARTY, THE CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES, AND PREDICTED THERE WOULD BE SOME DEMONSTRATIONS BUT THAT THESE WOULD BLOW OVER WITHIN A FEW DAYS. HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS PREPARED TO DEAL WITH ANY DISTURBANCES AND BELIEVED THAT ANY PROBLEMS OCCASIONED BY BUCARAM'S DISQUALIFICATION WOULD CAUSE MUCH LESS DAMAGE THAN HIS ASCENSION TO THE PRESIDENCY, OR LATER EXTRA LEGAL EFFORTS TO BLOCK HIM.

6. ARRATA STRESSED THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT VIEWED ITS ACTIONS AS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, AND NOT AS ANTI-DEMOCRATIC IN THEMSELVES. ARRATA PREDICTED THAT FEW OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD STRONGLY PROTEST BUCARAM'S DISQUALIFICATION, ALTHOUGH MOST OF THEM HAD BEEN FORCED TO TAKE A PUBLIC POSITION IN FAVOR OF THE PRESIDENCY BEING OPEN TO ALL CANDIDATES. HE SAID THERE WOULD BE NO REACTION WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES SINCE THE ENTIRE OFFICER CORPS WAS FEARFUL OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF BUCARAM BECOMING PRESIDENT.

7. COMMENT: UNLESS SOMETHING CHANGES THE GOE'S COLLECTIVE MIND AT THE LAST MINUTE, BUCARAM WILL BE

EXCLUDED FROM THE JULY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.
TALKING ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY THREE MONTHS AGO WITH
AMBASSADOR BLOOMFIELD, BUCARAM SAID HE DID NOT EXPECT
THAT THERE WOULD BE MASSIVE AND VIOLENT PUBLIC REACTION
TO THE CONTINGENCY. HE POINTED TO THE THREE TIMES THAT
THE POPULAR VELASCO IBARRA WAS KICKED OUT OF OFFICE
AFTER HAVING WON ELECTIONS, AND THE LACK OF PUBLIC
REACTION ON EACH OCCASION. "THE MILITARY HAD THE GUNS
AND WE DON'T", HE SAID, BUT HE ADDED THAT THE PUBLIC
WILL GET TIRED OF BEING DENIED SOONER OR LATER AND REACT.
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